

Message Text

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ACTION PM-04

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 L-03 SP-02

EB-07 DOTE-00 OES-06 SS-15 /052 W
----- 049778

R 310659Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8837

INFO CNMN

CINCPAC

COGARD ONSOD

COMDT USCG WASHDC

COMNAVELSYSCOM

CINCPACFLT

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6299

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, US, MARR

SUBJECT: OMEGA AUSTRALIA

REF: A) CANBERRA 6088 (DTG 240152Z AUG 76) B) OSNOD'S R281700Z
AUG 76 MESSAGE TO GOA DOT COASTAL SERVICES DIVISION

1. SUMMARY: EMBOFFS DISCUSSED GOA'S PLANS FOR AN OMEGA STATION WITH MESSRS. JACOB AND WILLOUGHBY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ON AUGUST 30. JACOB AND WILLOUGHBY BELIEVE PROBLEMS SURROUNDING OMEGA CAN BE OVERCOME. THE EMBASSY IS NOT AS OPTIMISTIC. END SUMMARY.

2. JACOB AND WILLOUGHBY SAID GOA WILL SEND AT LEAST ONE REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OMEGA TECHNICAL COFERENCE IN BERGEN AND PLANNED TO HAVE HIM STOP OVER IN WASHINGTON FOR TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS AFTER THE BERGEN MEETING. THEY THEN HOPED TO HAVE A US TEAM VISIT CANBERRA SOMETIME IN NOVEMBER TO
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NEGOTIATE AN AGREEMENT FOR THE AUSTRALIAN OMEGA STATION.

3. WILLOUGHBY GAVE US A TECHNICAL BRIEFING ON POSSIBLE OMEGA SITES IN AUSTRALIA. IT APPEARED THAT THE GOA WOULD PREFER THAT THE STATION BE SITED ON MACQUARIE ISLAND AS THIS WOULD ENABLE THE SYSTEM TO PROVIDE A SIGNAL WHICH WOULD COVER THE BASS STRAIT AS WELL AS THE APPROACHES TO MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY. A SITE IN SOUTHERN TASMANIA WAS THEIR SECOND OPTION AND A SITE IN THE MURRAY RIVER VALLEY APPEARED TO BE THEIR LAST CHOICE. BOTH WILLOUGHBY AND JACOBIE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE COST OF SITING AN OMEGA STATION ON MACQUARIE ISLAND MIGHT BE PROHIBITIVE AS IT WOULD COST ABOUT THREE TIMES AS MUCH TO BUILD A STATION THERE.

4. BOTH MEN ALSO NOTED THAT THE SIGNALS FROM THE ARGENTINA STATION WERE NOT RELIABLE IN AUSTRALIA AND THAT THE SIGNALS FROM THE JAPANESE STATION COULD BE RECEIVED IN AUSTRALIA ONLY AT NIGHT. THEY IMPLIED THAT THIS PREVIOUSLY UNANTICIPATED SITUATION INCREASES THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING AS SOUTHERLY A LOCATION AS POSSIBLE AND ARGUES IN FAVOR OF A MACQUARIE ISLAND SITE.

5. JACOBIE INDICATED THAT THE GOA FACED BOTH POLITICAL AND UNION PROBLEMS IN CONNECTION WITH OMEGA. HE POINTED OUT, -AS WE WERE ALREADY AWARE, THE PREMIER OF TASMANIA OPPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF AN OMEGA STATION IN TASMANIA, AND MACQUARIE ISLAND WAS NOT ONLY A PART OF TASMANIA BUT A STATE PARK AS WELL. JACOBIE SAID THAT MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION NIXON HAD INDICATED THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT TRY TO FORCE AN OMEGA STATION ON THE TASMANIA STATE GOVERNMENT, BUT THAT HE (JACOBIE) HOPED THAT THE PREMIER, MR. NEILSON, WOULD RECONSIDER HIS POSITION AFTER HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED ON THE PURPOSES OF THE OMEGA SYSTEM.

6. ON THE TRADE UNION SIDE, JACOBIE NOTED THAT THE GOA ALWAYS HAS SOME DIFFICULTIES WITH THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT ON ISSUES OF THIS NATURE. HE PLANNED TO APPROACH CHARLES FITZGIBBONS, THE FEDERAL SECRETARY OF THE WATERSIDE WORKERS FEDERATION AND ONE OF THE VICE PRESIDENTS OF THE ACTU, TO DISCUSS OMEGA WITH HIM.

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HE THOUGHT THAT WITH FITZGIBBON'S HELP LABOR OPPOSITION TO OMEGA COULD BE CONTAINED AND THE PROJECT COULD PROCEED.

7. EMBOFFS NOTED THAT TWO OF THE UNIONS WHICH OPPOSED OMEGA WERE COMMUNIST-LED AND ASKED HOW JACOBIE COULD ASSUME THAT COMMUNIST LABOR LEADERS WOULD CHANGE THEIR MIND ON OMEGA. JACOBIE RESPONDED THAT THE ONLY TRADE UNION LEADER HE KNEW WAS FITZGIBBONS WHO HAD BEEN HELP-

FUL IN SOLVING SIMILAR PROBLEMS IN THE PAST.

8. EMBOFF THEN ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF SEVERAL KEY UNIONS IMPOSED A BLACK BAN ON OMEGA. JACOB SAID THAT IF THIS OCCURRED THE MATTER WOULD BE REFERRED TO THE CABINET FOR A POLITICAL DECISION. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE GOA WOULD DISCUSS OMEGA WITH PREMIER NEILSON AND THE TRADE UNIONISTS IN TERMS OF A TASMANIAN OR MAINLAND SITE, AND HOLD THE PROSPECT OF A MACQUARIE ISLAND SITE AS A LAST RESORT FOR TACKTICAL REASONS EVEN THOUGH HE FELT IT WAS TECHNICALLY THE BEST SITE.

9. COMMENT: JACOB IS AN EXPERIENCE CIVIL SERVANT WITH SOME EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH AUSTRALIAN POLITICIANS AND TRADE UNIONISTS. WE HOPE HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IS CORRECT AND THAT CONSTRUCTION CAN PROCEED. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT BOTH PREMIER NEILSON AND COMMUNIST TRADE UNIONISTS, ESPECIALLY MESSRS. GALLAGHER AND CLANCY, ARE UNLIKELY TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS ON OMEGA. THIS BEING THE CASE, WE BELIEVE THERE ARE STILL SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES IN A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION TO THE MATTER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: OMEGA STATION, NAVIGATIONAL AIDS, MONITORING FACILITIES, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CANBER06299
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760329-1388
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976084/aaaaadce.tel
Line Count: 138
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION PM
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 CANBERRA 6088
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 MAR 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <15 SEP 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OMEGA AUSTRALIA
TAGS: MARR, AS, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006